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Far East District continues to reach out to local schools

Seoul — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Far East District's Good Neighbor Program hosted two "Kids in Hard Hats" events this month.

Students from Songwha Elementary School and Buyong Elementary School in Pyongtaek located near U.S. Army Garrison Humphreys were given the rare opportunity to learn from FED engineers about the huge construction and expansion project from the inside.

Col. Gordon Trounson, Deputy Director of the Korea Relocation Programs Office, represented the District Commander to Songwha Elementary School April 6. He gave the students a slideshow briefing about construction at USAG Humphreys which included a fly-over video.

"During the briefing that Col. Trounson and the engineers conducted, I learned a lot about the relocation, as well as my students. I'm really looking forward to seeing completed projects soon. I'm sure when they are completed it will be also beneficial to Koreans living in Pyongtaek," said Songwha Principal Seo Hyang-yeol.

Trounson took the students to an overlook site so they could see firsthand the progress of the expansion.

"The size of the expanding land amazed me," said Seo. "I really appreciate the Far East District for giving my students this valuable opportunity to get on post and see the installation under construction."

Trounson presented 800 English books to the school on behalf of the entire district. Songwha is one of the largest elementary schools adjacent to USAG Humphreys with over 650 students and 50 faculty members. They had been trying to establish an English section in their library for a long time.

"The English books that we received today will fill the school library and help my students become more interested in English study," said Seo. "I hope FED can provide more students a chance to have this kind of experience in the future and support the school's English classes."

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The majority of the books were donated to the District's Good Neighbor Program by Seoul American High School's National Honor Society. Since 2009 the NHS has collected over 5,000 books for this program. Other books have been donated by Second Hand Rose Gift Shop located on USAG Yongsan's South Post and District employees.

Of course, the "Kids in Hard Hats" program also offers the students the opportunity to have fun during their visit. They scaled the climbing wall at the Zoeckler Station Gym and enjoyed lunch at the Red Dragon Inn dining facility. Even the engineers had an enjoyable experience.

"The Good Neighbor Program is an excellent opportunity for furthering our strong alliance," said Trounson. "It is much more than just showing these students the Korea Relocation Program. It is to let them know that they are an important part for the future of our two countries' common goal of peace and prosperity for the Korean peninsula."

After being with FED for about a year and a half, Trounson will be leaving Korea soon. During his tour of duty he has participated in numerous Good Neighbor Programs and events, including "Kids in Hard Hats."

Songwha may be Trounson's last Good Neighbor event, but for Warrant Officer Susan Bostick, FED Logistics Operations Officer, it was her first.

"Those kids were thrilled to be here [at Humphreys]," said Bostick. "This program definitely put a smile on their faces."

The experience with Songwha Elementary School paid off for Bostick because a week later she represented the District Commander during the next Good Neighbor event with Buyong Elementary School, but she did not mind doing it all over again.

"I had just as much fun as the kids did," said Bostick.

Even the teachers at Buyong had fun and they all attempted to climb the climbing wall in the gym along with their students.

"Thanks to FED's hard work my students and the school staff had a wonderful time," said Seo Hyeong-seok, an English Teacher at Buyong. "We are taking a valuable experience and memories back with us. This visit helped us understand what's going on inside the base in our neighborhood."

Just like at Songwha, the students and faculty from Buyong were presented 800 books from FED.

"The books presented today will be a great asset to the school and will help my students a lot when they study English," said Seo. "I really appreciate all of you who donated books and welcomed us so warmly."